

Despite Barack Obama's claims, evidence shows innocent Pakistanis are paying a high price for the war on terror

Christina Lamb  
Washington  
Chris Woods and  
Rahimullah Yusufzai  
Peshawar

PRESIDENT Barack Obama is under pressure to admit that his secret drone war on militants in Pakistan has killed hundreds of civilians. At least 50 of the victims are said to have died in follow-up raids while going to the aid of casualties or attending funerals.

Speaking publicly for the first time about the CIA drone strikes, Obama said last week they were used strictly to target terrorists. He rejected what he called "this perception we're just sending in a whole bunch of strikes willy-nilly".

"Drones have not caused a huge number of civilian casualties," he told a questioner in an online forum. "This is a targeted, focused effort at people who are on a list of active terrorists who are trying to go in and harm Americans."

But an extensive investigation by the London-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism, including first-hand witness reports, has found that since Obama took office three years ago, between 282 and 535 civilians have been reported killed, including more than 60 children.

The bureau's research, published this weekend, is in part corroborated by the New America Foundation, an independent Washington think tank, which has documented the deaths of between 1,354 and 2,254 people in drone attacks. It estimates that between 145 and 313 victims were civilians.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which is taking legal action against the administration over the drone campaign, claims the numbers are much higher. It is calling for the government to release its so-called "kill list" of targets and publish its criteria for launching an attack.

"One of the biggest problems is the lack of information and accountability of what's going on," said Christof Heyns, a South African law professor and United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions.

Although the drone attacks were begun by President George W Bush in 2004, they have escalated greatly under Obama. There have been 260 attacks by unmanned Predators or Reapers in Pakistan since he came to power in 2009 — almost one every four days. Because the operations are conducted by the CIA, no information is given on casualties.

John Brennan, the president's top counterterrorism adviser, insists America has the right to strike terrorists anywhere in the world. "Because we are engaged in an armed conflict with Al-Qaeda, the United States takes the legal position that, in accordance with international law, we have the authority to take action against Al-Qaeda and its associated forces," he told a conference last year.



Civilians, including children, right, have been victims of the drone attacks

## Covert CIA drones kill hundreds of civilians

The US insists it has the right to try to kill Taliban fighters in Pakistan



Some international lawyers disagree, saying the strikes are little more than state executions and questioning how America would react if China or Russia took similar action against their enemies.

Last June, Brennan claimed there had not been "a single collateral death" for almost a year. Yet eyewitness accounts gathered by independent Pakistani researchers suggest scores of civilians were killed in that time.

The first confirmed strike in which rescuers died took place in North Waziristan on May 16, 2009. According to Mushtaq Yusufzai, a local journalist, Taliban militants had gathered in the village of Khaisor. After prayers, they were preparing to cross the nearby border into Afghanistan to launch an attack on American forces. But the US struck first.

A drone fired missiles into

the fighters, killing at least a dozen. Villagers joined the surviving Taliban to retrieve the dead and injured. As rescuers clambered through the demolished buildings two more missiles were fired into the rubble. A total of at least 29 people died.

"We lost very trained and sincere friends," a Taliban commander told The News, a Pakistani newspaper. "Some of them were very senior Taliban commanders and had taken part in successful actions in Afghanistan."

For the Americans the attack was a success, but locals say six villagers also died. They were identified by the researchers as Sabir, Ikram, Mohib, Zahid, Mashal and Syed Noor (people in the area often use one name).

Yusufzai, who reported on the attack, said those killed in the follow-up strike "were trying to pull out the bodies and take people to hospital".

From May 2009 to June 2011, at least 15 attacks on rescuers were reported by news organisations including The New York Times, CNN, Associated Press, ABC News and Al Jazeera.

In Pakistan's tribal areas, journalists are routinely threatened by both militants and the military. Yet for three months a team of local researchers has been seeking independent confirmation of the strikes for The Sunday Times.

They found evidence of civilians killed in 10 of the reported drone attacks on rescuers. Two attacks on funeral mourners were also confirmed by the team and other sources.

Five civilians who died in a single strike on mourners have been identified by the bureau. In another attack, between 18 and 45 civilians were reported killed when drones hit a militant funeral attended by thousands.

Samiullah Khan, a field researcher for the bureau from North Waziristan, narrowly escaped becoming a drone statistic himself. On September 16, 2010, he travelled to Danda Darpakhel to interview a Taliban commander. Within five minutes an explosion blew out the windows; drones had struck a house two doors down.

"I saw people crying, 'Help us, help us.' There was a huge fire," said Khan, who worked as a field researcher on this investigation. "Since everyone in the house was dead or injured, the only people who could help were other villagers or the Taliban I'd been interviewing."

The notorious Haqqani network, whose fighters often attack US forces in Afghanistan, runs a madrasah in Danda Darpakhel. The town has suffered numerous drone attacks.

Khan took three badly burnt

people to hospital in his truck. While he was away the drones struck again. "If I had been there I would have been caught in that explosion. People there were killed, including two of my friends. They were good people. One was a student, the other ran a stall at the local bazaar. Neither was involved with the Taliban." They were among five villagers who died that day.

The Taliban often seals off the sites of US attacks and retrieves its own dead. But an examination of thousands of reports of drone strikes showed frequent references to civilian rescuers. Mosques often exhort villagers to help.

Heyns, the UN rapporteur, is calling for an investigation. "Allegations of repeat strikes coming back after half an hour when medical personnel are on the ground are very worrying," he said. "To target civilians would be crimes of war."

One of the most devastating attacks came on March 17 last year, the day after Pakistan released Raymond Davis, an American CIA contractor jailed for shooting dead two motorcyclists in Lahore in January. Davis was freed after a payment of "blood money" said to be about \$2.3m (£1.45m).

The CIA was said to be furious about the affair. When the next day's drone strike killed up to 42 at a meeting in North Waziristan, Pakistani officials thought it was retaliation.

A senior Pakistani officer who was commanding a brigade in the area at the time admitted that in drone attacks "people invariably get reported as innocent bystanders". But in this case he had no doubt. The meeting attacked was a tribal jirga to resolve a dispute over a chromite mine and if any Taliban were there it was a maximum of one or two as observers, he told The Sunday Times.

Drones have been a source of tension between the US and Pakistan despite Islamabad's tacit agreement to the attacks. In return, America ensured that some of the terrorists killed were wanted by Pakistan.

The relationship became stretched to breaking point, first with the raid to kill Osama Bin Laden last May, and then with the US bombing of a Pakistani border post in November, killing 24 soldiers. In December, Pakistan ordered the CIA to vacate its Shamsi base in Baluchistan. For a while the drone attacks stopped but they resumed a fortnight ago.

**RESCUERS AND FUNERAL MOURNERS ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN KILLED**

The US insists the drones have helped to wipe out much of the Al-Qaeda leadership in Pakistan. Critics say they have stoked resentment of America in a country boasting an arsenal of 200 nuclear weapons.

Peter Singer, a specialist on 21st-century war at the Brookings Institution in Washington, said the drone campaign had never been debated in Congress, which has to approve sending American forces to war.

Unease has grown as the attacks have been expanded to targets in Libya, Yemen and Somalia. Three US citizens

were killed by missiles fired from drones in Yemen last September. Anwar al-Awlaki, a senior US-born Al-Qaeda operative, was among those targeted in what critics described as an execution of a US citizen without trial.

Although drone attacks have become more precise, human intelligence is needed to identify targets and mistakes inevitably occur.

"We've seen in the context of detentions in Guantanamo and Bagram that the government frequently makes mistakes, but at least there the cases can be reviewed," said Nathan Wessler, an ACLU lawyer. "Once the government fires a missile, there's no comeback."

Until Obama's comments last week, the White House would not even confirm the CIA programme existed.

"We don't discuss classified programmes or comment on alleged strikes," said a senior administration official in response to the findings presented by The Sunday Times. The CIA refused to comment.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit last week demanding the release of the administration's records on the killing of the three US citizens in Yemen.

Privately, some senior US military officers say they are uncomfortable that the CIA, which is not covered by laws of war or the Geneva convention, is carrying out the missions.

Heyns said a legal framework was needed to govern the use of drones.

"Our concern is how far does it go — will the whole world be a theatre of war?" he asked. "Drones in principle allow collateral damage to be minimised, but because they can be used without danger to a country's own troops they tend to be used more widely," he said. "One doesn't want to use the term ticking bomb, but it's extremely seductive."

## Mubarak's allies 'planted thugs to attack Cairo football fans'

Sara Hashash  
Port Said

AN INQUIRY into the "massacre of Port Said", in which at least 75 football fans died, is examining allegations that remnants of the former president Hosni Mubarak's regime stoked the violence.

Egypt's worst sporting disaster has been followed by street battles across the country as public anger mounts over the failure of police and the military-led government to prevent so many deaths at the stadium.

A parliamentary mission is investigating claims in the Mediterranean port city that hundreds of thugs were hired to attack visiting supporters of Cairo's al-Ahly side during Wednesday night's game.

Angry residents on Friday seized Mohammed Refa'at Masad, 43, a member of a notoriously violent gang, after they recognised him from photographs as one of the troublemakers at the match.

He reportedly claimed to MPs that he and hundreds of gang members had been paid to foment trouble by Gamal Omar, a local businessman and personal friend of Mubarak's younger son Gamal, who was once being groomed to take over as president. Other former members of Mubarak's National Democratic party in Port Said were involved, he said.

A restaurant owned by Omar was stormed by demonstrators, who smashed its windows. Whether Masad's allegations are true or not, the public fury illustrates the widespread disillusion over the failure of Egypt's revolution a year after Mubarak's fall and a belief that elements of the old regime remain in power.

"This is not in the nature of the people of Port Said," said May, a city resident. "I know people who helped hide al-Ahly fans, or protected them and escorted them to the station so they could return to Cairo."

Many witnesses at the game, which the local side al-Masry

won 3-1, pointed to signs that the violence was planned. "My son was at the match and he said it was full of strange-looking people, not from around here," said Mona, a housewife.

Omar Abdel Fattah, 25, claimed: "Security is usually highest when the Cairo teams al-Ahly or Zamalek come here. That day they didn't check IDs or tickets or search any of the spectators — it was abnormally lax. Usually you can't even take a lighter into the stadium."

Ahmed Awkal, an al-Masry fan, said: "Why would we attack? We won; we were celebrating. They want to trigger a civil war; that's what they're trying to do. They want to turn the Egyptian people against one another so the revolution fails."

Riot police stood by as thugs, many armed with clubs, rocks and knives, stormed the pitch, forcing al-Ahly's players to flee. Traces of the fierce battle were visible in the stadium yesterday. Seats were spattered with dried blood, and the

ground was littered with rock fragments, wood and steel bars and shoes lost by stampeding fans. Blood smeared the walls and steps of the stands. The stadium's metal gates, which had been locked, lay trampled.

Ashraf Abul Hassan, the doctor in charge of the casualty department at Port Said hospital that night, said: "The proportion of dead we received compared to injured was very high. In an incident of this kind you would expect far greater numbers of wounded. This leads me to suspect that the intent of the attackers was to kill, not to injure."

Few bodies had visible stab wounds or external injuries, so suffocation or head injuries were probable causes of death, he concluded. Many of the dead were students or teenagers, including the youngest, Anas Mohiedeen, 14, from Cairo.

Protesters and MPs from the newly elected parliament see the tragedy as proof that the ruling military council is inept. Marchers at the interior min-



Fans protest after the violence led a match to be cancelled

istry in Cairo chanted: "If you can't secure a match, tell me how you will secure Egypt?"

Parts of central Cairo have become like war zones in the past few days as protesters fight running battles with police. Other violent protests in Suez and the coastal city of Alexandria left at least eight dead and more than 2,500 injured.

Lawlessness is rife in the country, with incidents of car-

jacking and kidnapping, and a prison breakout in Cairo's Marg district reported yesterday. Police have largely vanished from city streets, adding to the sense of instability.

In Port Said the mood is tense but defiant. Residents hope the MPs' investigation will restore the city's name. "These are not our kind; we are a peaceful people. It has to have been planned," said Awkal.

## Beijing comes clean on toxic air

Michael Sheridan  
Hong Kong

IN A remarkable victory for people power, the authorities in Beijing have bowed to public demands to reveal the amount of dangerous fine particles in the city's choking air.

It followed a battle between the censors and the American embassy, which published on Twitter its own measurements of the pollution. The readings were then re-posted by Chinese websites.

The government gave in after a bout of winter smog that was so toxic Beijing airport had to suspend flights because pilots could not see other aircraft.

Up to 700,000 people die every year in China from pollution caused by smokestack industries, millions of vehicles, hundreds of thousands of construction sites and, in Beijing's case, swirling dust from the Gobi desert.

Pan Shiyi, a property developer who symbolises the

yuppie aspirations of many young Beijingers, started complaining on his blog, which has 7m followers. Then an editor named Yu Ping began an open campaign to force officials to disclose the data, counting on the fact that China's elite has to breathe Beijing's air — at least when they step outside their air-conditioned offices.

When the American embassy began publishing the results of monitoring from the roof of its compound, there was immediate conflict. The Chinese maintained that Beijing had good air 80% of the time; the Americans said it had bad air 80% of the time.

The authorities were finally forced to give in. For the past fortnight they have issued their own figures for the tiny pollution particles in Beijing. They show better quality air than the data from the American embassy, but an important principle has been conceded.